



INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS,
DELIVERED JAN. 15, 1844,
TO THE STUDENTS
OF THE
MANCHESTER
SCHOOL OF DESIGN,
BY MR. GEORGE WALLIS,
THE MASTER APPOINTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL OF DESIGN IN LONDON.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

I AM anxious, before commencing my duties as Master of the School of Design in Manchester, to address you with reference to those duties, and to explain to you the course which it is proposed should be pursued in conducting this very important Institution.

The subject of Design, as applied to Manufactures, has excited particular attention in this country of late years: inquiries have been made into the causes of our alleged inferiority to our Continental rivals in the Arts of Design, and it has been found that on the Continent, in different countries—more especially in France and Germany—numerous schools exist, founded, and in part maintained, by their respective governments, for the instruction of all classes in Drawing and Design; and that to this fact, in a great measure, the superiority of our rivals is to be attributed.

I shall glance briefly at the history of Design in past ages.

We find that in the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman times, Ornamental Design (I confine myself in these observations to the branch of art we have to study) was distinguished by peculiar characteristics. The designers of those times and nations trod in particular paths, from which they never diverged; and on seeing a piece of ancient ornament, we can, after some study, tell at a glance by what people and at what period it was made.

In the middle ages this was also for some time the case. But in the present state of the world all is changed: neither the English, nor the French, nor the Germans, can be said to exhibit, in the designs for their manufactures, any peculiar, distinctive, national style of art, which would enable a person to say,—this manufacture is English—this French; but amongst all these people, ornaments and designs are borrowed from the art of all ages and countries; thus we manufacture Persian shawls, Indian dresses, and articles in the Greek, Roman, Gothic, and Revival tastes. The French and Germans do the same.

Now this being the case, it must be evident to you that a designer has a great deal to study to enable him to meet the tastes—at times, perhaps, the caprices, of his countrymen. It must, I repeat, be evident to you, that before you can acquire a knowledge of the forms of all the different modes of decorating and designing, much time must be consumed in study. The facts which I have thus briefly detailed to you must, I think, give interest to these studies; and it seems to me to follow, from what I have said, that the more direct the mode of instruction, the better it must be for you. It takes some time

to become acquainted with the peculiar and characteristic forms of certain styles of ornament, and surely the best way of learning these is directly to study them.

Some people are of opinion, that by the study of the figure you can best be introduced to ornamental design, and that in fact it is the foundation of all drawing whatever. But the fact is, that excellent draughtsmen of the figure exist everywhere, who know nothing of ornament; and if we look back to the history of Art, we often find that fine figure draughtsmen were bad ornamentists. Michael Angelo himself (if I may say it without irreverence) was a bad ornamentist! It is perfectly true, that if a student draw the figure well, (the most difficult of all attainments in drawing,) he will soon learn to draw ornament very well, when he comes to study it; but a bad figure draughtsman will not learn to draw ornament sooner or better than a man who does not draw the figure at all. Now, how long will it take to make a good draughtsman of the figure? Years! Years of study are found to be necessary; but limit the number, and say three. The study of ornament has then thereafter to begin, and more years must be consumed in studying the styles and characteristics of different kinds of ornament; for it is a long and difficult study, and it will require three years to do something valuable. *Now, where is the manufacturing Designer who can afford this long course of study?* In the three years which he has spent in learning the figure, he might (we know from experience) have become a capital draughtsman of ornament,—he might have been able to design for more than one branch of manufacture.

But, by the system of instruction drawn up by our General Director, and approved by the Council, you will find that the figure is *not* excluded; on the contrary, it is to be taught, and carefully taught, wherever it is required by the student of those branches of Design of which it forms an essential part.

The subject of drawing the figure has, I understand, been the occasion of much discussion and controversy here as elsewhere, and on that account has particularly attracted the attention of the Council at Somerset House, which has called to its assistance the most eminent men in Art of the present day. Their opinion, together with the practice in the most distinguished Continental Schools, form the basis of the course of study which I have just stated to you has been drawn up by our Director, Mr. Wilson, and by which I shall be guided, and of which the characteristic is, that the figure is never to be studied merely as a *means* of acquiring the power of drawing, but always for its own sake, as an *end*, and with reference to some department or branch of the art of Design necessarily and essentially requiring it.

From my imperfect knowledge of your town and surrounding localities, and their peculiar wants as regards the art of Design, I must restrict my observations to such points as, being matter of general notoriety, I cannot be supposed to be uninformed of. Besides mere decorative or useful arts, admitting or requiring ornament, as works in metal, wood, stone, or similar materials,—arts which are to be found in every great and important community like this,—Manchester possesses numerous manufactures of cotton, silk, and wool, which derive a great portion of their value from

the *patterns applied to them*, either in the loom or by processes of printing; the designing of which gives employment and encouragement to the taste and talent of a great number of individuals. From information derived from the friends and promoters of this Institution,—themselves engaged in these manufactures,—I learn that of late years the art of designing, both here and in London, has not kept pace with the demand for patterns of a higher order, and that at this moment the greatest part of the finest designs for these manufactures are not drawn in England, but are imported from Paris, at an enormous expense, *lost to this country* and to our designers, and gained by France as the reward of her superior taste and talent.

One cause of this great superiority of the French over us in taste, (which, as it is felt and expressed by the public, and is thus acknowledged by our manufacturers themselves, it is in vain to deny,)—has been the institution of Schools of Design by our rivals, long ere we ourselves were sensible of their necessity and importance.

I trust, however, that this superiority will be of short duration. The whole nation is now aroused to a sense of the importance of the subject, and no town in the British empire has a deeper interest in the cultivation of that hitherto-neglected faculty called Taste, than this great town of Manchester, which has won for itself an unrivalled reputation, by the variety, the excellence, and the cheapness of its productions. Add but the fancy, elegance, and taste of the French, and our preëminence will be complete.

It is the province of *this School* to afford you the means of arriving at such eminence, and mine is the

duty of shewing you the paths which experience has already proved will conduct you to it.

On yourselves, then, *on you, the young and rising generation*, will rest the responsibility (and it is great) of rescuing your profession, which is an honourable one, and your country, which expects it of you, from the *reproach* of an uncultivated and unrefined taste in Decorative and Ornamental Art.

I shall now endeavour to explain to you the plan which must be followed in this, as in every other Government School.

By the Rules it is declared that all must enter the elementary class. That Rule, of course, applies to those who enter for the first time, and its object is simply to enable me to ascertain the capacity of the student. Besides, it is generally found that so few young men have been taught the rudiments of drawing,—so few understand the first principles, that it is absolutely necessary to teach them these.

I have, however, to explain to you that you will not be compelled to go through a fixed routine; this must depend on the ability which you display. Those who exhibit superior talent will, of course, progress at a more rapid rate than others who are less favourably endowed; and the latter class will be required to go through a great number of elementary lessons. From copying simple forms, you will proceed to more complicated ones, and every copy which you make will have some reference to your particular pursuits, as I shall be anxious to explain to you in the course of teaching.

You will obtain a very considerable knowledge of certain ornamental forms in making these first copies, and I have to inform you that it will be no slight

capacity for drawing them that will permit me to advance you to a higher class. You must, before learning anything else, draw an outline with precision and taste, and a clever student may learn to draw well in about six months, although he know nothing of drawing when he commences; he may, I say, with due industry and attention, be able to draw a large corinthian capital, or some other equally difficult ornament, at the end of six months.

It is then advisable for the pupil that he be taught shading, that he may the better understand form, and those who draw well in outline learn to do this easily in a very short time. In about three months they may learn to shade quite as well as the French lithographs are shaded which we copy. From shading from these lithographs we proceed to shading from the cast.

Now I would have you to observe that all must not be taught to shade in the same manner. Some must effect this with chalk; but others, to whom learning to colour soon is a great object, must be taught to shade with indian ink,—must be taught the use of the brush as soon as possible.

The designers for manufactures of hard materials must study with chalk, because most of those designers require a knowledge of the figure, and the figure may be best drawn with chalk; but designers for silk, calico, woollen, chintz, *et cetera*, do not require a knowledge of the figure: *they* must learn to use the brush as soon as possible, and therefore commence with indian ink, as the best mode, for this class, of learning to shade.

When the student can make a good drawing properly shaded, he passes to colouring if he requires it, and I shall be ready to instruct such students in the

use of oil and distemper colours. I shall also be able to give instructions in *fresco* and *fresco secco*, a new art first brought into this country by the Director, Mr. Wilson, and which will be found very interesting, and of particular value to house decorators.

When the students are thus far advanced, it will become my duty to explain to them, to the best of my ability, the characteristics of different styles of Art, and it is to be hoped that we may then be shewing some fruit from our studies, and that advanced pupils may be making various designs under my directions.

We shall at this time copy natural objects, such as flowers, fruits, birds, insects, shells, *et cetera*,—then endeavour to combine these and treat them ornamentally. Whilst speaking of this department of Art, allow me to assure you, that it will be impossible, as you advance in your power of drawing such objects, (the works of Nature being the source and fountain of all true beauty,) not to feel your hearts expand, your taste improved and refined, and the conviction more and more established in your mind, of the power, greatness, and goodness of their Divine Author.

I may mention also, that about this time such students as require to study the figure, will be permitted to do so. It has been observed, that in Schools where the figure is much taught, there is a tendency on the part of the pupils to aim at becoming artists. This proceeds in a great measure from their want of knowledge. They are unaware of the importance of decorative art—they know not what may be achieved in it; they undervalue it, and thoughtlessly embrace the profession of the artist, than which, without great ability, there is not one more hopeless.

The career of the *mediocre* artist must be one of poverty and disappointment. No one, unfortunately, sympathizes with him,—no one regards him or his works; whereas, had he pursued the occupation of the ornamental designer, he might have attained a lucrative and respectable position.

The art of the ornamental designer is daily rising in interest and importance. Our upper classes travel much, and examine the fine works of Italy, and their imitations in France and Germany. They study the different styles of ornament as a branch of polite education, and we hear gentlemen speak of Roman, Byzantine, and Revival styles, and find that they perfectly understand and appreciate their respective merits, and desire to possess examples.

It must be evident to you, that to meet the expectations of such intelligent persons, much study will be required on your part, and it is delightful to reflect that it is one of the most pleasing nature; that after the first lessons are overcome, every step in advance will be of a very interesting description. You will be led to study the history of the past through the most beautiful of its creations. You will become acquainted with the great nations of antiquity by means of the beautiful productions of their taste and genius. You will study the styles which the religious enthusiasm of the middle ages fostered and perfected, and those also which arose out of the refined and elegant studies of the choicest spirits of Italy and France;—the beautiful ornaments with which Raphael, the Prince of Ornamental Painters, decorated the Vatican, and other productions of kindred genius, taste, and feeling.

If you *thus think of your pursuits*, you cannot fail to feel a deep interest in them, and to study with ardour for the very love of them, independently of other considerations.

I shall now touch on the course which I propose to pursue in commencing our intercourse of Master and Pupil.

I shall first ascertain how far some of you are advanced, and what you have done, that I may regulate your subsequent studies; and I wish you to understand that I am very desirous of meeting you on the most friendly terms. I request that you will frankly tell me all about your past studies,—tell me your object in coming here; since, unless I can perfectly understand these things, it is impossible for me to judge what is best to be done. Never hesitate a moment about consulting me on every point; and if in giving explanation I do not at first succeed in making myself understood, only apply to me for further aid; since I am particularly desirous that our intercourse should be characterised by a frank and friendly communication.

Those who enter the school now, must, of course, commence the usual elementary studies.

With reference to the discipline of the school, I expect you will be orderly and industrious, and that you will observe silence, it being my intention to see that the general rules are strictly enforced. A number of students will, no doubt, join the school with an anxious desire to learn; and you must feel aware that it is the duty of the master to protect these from disturbance by those who may be less industriously inclined.

The first three months, you observe, will be

probationary. At the end of that time all drawings will be laid before the members of the Committee, and those students who are idle, and therefore do not make satisfactory progress, will be dismissed.

It is necessary for me thus to allude to the discipline of the school, because I desire that you should understand me, and feel that I am firmly resolved to endeavour to do my duty. Dismissing, however, this portion of my subject, I would rather dwell, in conclusion, on the agreeable intercourse which is now commenced. You will find me anxious to gain your confidence, and desirous of promoting your advancement to the best of my ability; and I trust that I may look forward to industry, energy, and good conduct on your part, in the pursuit of your important studies.

Government, in the establishment of these Schools, has conferred on the country an inestimable boon. Let us try to prove that we appreciate it; and as we have shewn the world a bright example in science,—eclipsing every other nation that exists, in its practical application;—let us, in like manner, resolve to emulate them also in Art and Taste.

In conclusion, allow me to express my hope, as I can assure you it is my earnest wish, that the MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF DESIGN may attain that degree of eminence its promoters are anxious to witness,—the importance of which, as connected with the commercial and other interests of the country, has been so often and so fully pointed out; and that you will aid me—(for I can assure you, my young friends,

there is great power within yourselves to do so)—
in rendering this School second only in importance
and character to that of its parent Institution at
Somerset House.

There is great power within ourselves to do right—
 in resisting the social evils, in improving
 and cherishing to that of our present condition as
 General House.

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